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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: BERMUDA: GANGS, GUNS, AND CRIME

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11. (SBU) Summary: Crime, in particular gang-related and gun crime, is increasing on the island. The Consul General met with the Bermuda Governor on December 16th and Bermuda and its citizens are uniting together to combat the violent crime problem. The Government is even considering imposing curfews to curb the violence. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On the morning of December 17, 2009, a man was gunned down in Friswells Hill; the third man to be murdered in 13 days. (The other two shootings occurred in Somerset and Pembroke.) There have been 17 shootings since May when people have been killed or injured; no discernable pattern or location is evident. In a country of just over 65,000 persons, people are rightly concerned of this large increase in gun-crime.

13. (SBU) The official American community is not immune to the crime increase. One residence experienced a break-in and a few others reported attempted break-ins this summer. Just recently, the dependent of an American official was robbed of his electronics while riding the public bus home from school.

14. (SBU) The Governor indicated to the Consul General during their December 16th meeting that despite press to the contrary, government house and the government are on the same page and united in tackling the growing violent crime problem. At the swearing in of new Police Commissioner Michael DeSilva on December 16th, Minister for Home Affairs David Burch publicly confirmed this. The Governor observed that the new Police Commissioner and his team were much more interested in overseas assistance and training. The Governor noted that police would maintain operational control, but would check with government and government house on two areas: prioritization and presentation. In these two areas, the Bermuda Police Service (BPS) needed the consensus of government and government house.

15. (SBU) The Governor attributed most of the violence to two gangs - the Park Side gang and the 42nd Street gang. Assistant Commissioner Paul Wright told the CG that there were 18 gangs active on the island, but most of these gangs were amorphous and some of them were more akin to neighborhood groups. Wright noted that the BPS had drawn up an initial list of 48 Persons of Interest (POI), but that list has shrunk to 38

over the past year, as many have been shot. Wright worried, however, that if Bermuda did not solve the problem, young Bermudians could join and the problem could mushroom out of control.

¶6. (U) In a grass-roots reaction to the recent escalation in gang-related shootings, more than 400 people gathered together at a local primary school on December 9th to discuss ways to promote gang intervention, faith-based leadership, community capacity building, national mentoring and youth, vision and development. An educator and three brothers - one a former top aid to the premier and another, the head of the Police media relations office - were the catalysts for the group, named "We Will Rise Above, Bermuda." A group spokesman said the community had reached a turning point where average people recognize the need to work together for change. Participants, challenged to come up with workable solutions within 30 days, are considering calling a gang truce and establishing an underground network of safe houses for gang members trying to leave.

¶7. (U) Bermuda police initiated Operation Safer Streets earlier this year, which resulted in a 60 percent increase in arrests, an almost 40 percent upturn in drug enforcement activity, and the number of serious assaults falling by 28 percent since 2008. Police Commissioner DeSilva stated to the press, "In October we restructured the organization to place 85 percent of our staff directly in the fight against crime. On patrol, in Criminal Investigation Unit-drug unit and serious crime unit." He assured that all officers will be on operational patrols throughout the New Year.

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¶8. (SBU) BPS is seeking more help in combating gangs, crisis management, crime scene examination, forensic pathology, and close protection. The FBI's Safe Street Gang Unit is coming to the island in early January to provide training, review Bermuda's plans and provide analysis in other gang-related areas. RSO is working with DS/ATA to identify immediate assistance with regards to VIP Protection training. Further discussions are underway to determine whether long-term DS-provided training can be organized.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: Gang-related violence and petty crime has increased and is spilling over into the community. American citizens are not being targeted, however the violence is occurring in broad daylight and its indiscriminate nature makes it problematic for residents and tourists alike. Bermuda, although a country, is also a relatively small community; the government and its citizens are taking the latest events seriously. However with tourism and annual revenue down considerably over the past two years and with no sign of the economy improving (for example, one in six businesses in St. George's has closed in the last 18 months), crime will continue to increase. Hopefully with additional training and resources, the BPS will be better prepared to tackle the issues at hand.ROSHOLT